

Virginia “Adopt-A-Stream” is a statewide litter education and cleanup campaign aimed at promoting citizen-based stewardship of the Commonwealth’s water resources.

Initiated by Gov. Jim Gilmore in 1998, Adopt-A-Stream encourages citizen-based stewardship of the Commonwealth’s water resources, promotes education and outreach, and facilitates community capacity building. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation implements Adopt-A-Stream and is dedicated to working with citizens to cleanup Virginia’s waterways. The successful implementation of the program depends on the involvement of and support from existing local and regional organizations including local governments, soil and water conservation districts, and grass-roots environmental groups.



Keeping Virginia’s rivers, streams, and lakes litter-free is a task that requires cooperation and participation from governments, industry, businesses, and residents alike. Stream cleanups are opportunities for local businesses, civic organizations, churches, watershed associations, schools, and scout groups to work independently or collectively to clean up the commonwealth’s water resources. The Adopt-A-Stream Program requires at least one clean-up per year. Groups are encouraged to conduct two clean-ups per year, once in the spring and once in the fall.

Waterway cleanup projects are valuable learning experiences. For example, a Saturday morning spent collecting litter from a local stream establishes a connection between citizens and the stream that runs through their community. Citizens will see, first-hand, the impacts of their cleanup efforts on the condition of the stream and quality of the water. Ultimately, such cleanups should encourage and empower citizens to participate in other activities aimed at improving water quality in Virginia.

The success of a cleanup event will depend on the organization and implementation of a waterway cleanup project plan. *This manual provides the information you will need to organize and implement a waterway cleanup from beginning to end.* Groups are encouraged to use the information as needed and to modify the information to suit individual needs.

Questions or concerns should be directed to the Adopt-A-Stream coordinator at:

Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation
203 Governor Street, Suite 206
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Phone (804) 692-0148
Fax (804) 786-1798
E-mail: adoptastream@dcr.state.va.us

Organizing a Waterway Cleanup

Establish an organizing committee: a core group of individuals dedicated to organizing and implementing the stream cleanup.

1. First determine location of cleanup and project date (*remember to choose a rain date*).
2. Next the committee should conduct a site visit, arrange for trash disposal, recruit volunteers, gather materials and supplies, contact property owners, and solicit project support.

The stream cleanup checklist (*included*) is a tool that may be used by the committee to monitor planning progress. Committee members should meet regularly before the project date to share successes and troubleshoot potential problems. As project volunteers are recruited, invite them to share some of the organizing tasks!

Site Selection

Determine the waterway cleanup project site.

- river
- stream
- creek
- pond
- lake
- anywhere litter has accumulated

Projects can be on public lands, such as parks, community property or open space. Projects can also be on private property, in which case you might include individual landowners.

*****Whether the site is public or private property, the organizing committee must receive permission to be on the land **prior** to the project date.***

Scouting

A member of the organizing committee should walk the stream *8 to 10 weeks* before the cleanup. A scouting survey of the stream section to be cleaned will give a better idea about the amount and types of litter volunteers will be exposed to. A survey will also allow the committee to approximate how many volunteers will be needed for the cleanup.

A member of the organizing committee should also walk the stream *two weeks* prior to the project date. During this walk, the committee member should create a series of maps that will help cleanup crews locate accumulations of litter. Survey information might include sizes, types, and abundance

of objects. The surveyor should also note whether objects can be hauled out on foot and, if not, whether a truck is necessary.

When scouting your community for a cleanup site, consider the following factors:

- Is the site safe (please consider steep slopes and class of rapids)?
- Is the site accessible to volunteers (easy to enter and exit)?
- What was the site used for in the past?
- Is the site too large for a single cleanup day or will several cleanups be required?
- What types of trash or debris are present?
- Are there any sensitive areas that should be treated with care?
- Are there hazardous substances present that make a stream unsuitable for a cleanup by volunteers? *(It may be helpful to contact the Department of Health, Division of Health Hazards Control at (804) 786-1763.)*

Project Date

Select the project date and time of the event. Determine the date 8 to 10 weeks before the event. Typically, Saturday mornings are the best time to schedule a cleanup. Be careful to avoid a holiday weekend or a weekend when the switch is made to and from Daylight Savings Time. The organizing committee should also allow adequate time for project planning and volunteer recruitment. If equipment will be borrowed, the organizing committee should make these arrangements first, and select a day when the equipment is available. Remember to establish a rain date!

A stream cleanup typically lasts about four hours. The organizing committee should also plan an additional half-hour before the event for setup and a half-hour afterwards for cleanup. Additional time may be required after the event, if a picnic or barbecue is planned.

Central Meeting Place

Locate and reserve a central meeting place. The organizing committee should reserve a facility or location 8 to 10 weeks prior to the event, where volunteers will meet the day of the project. It should be no more than a 20-minute drive from the farthest stream section or litter accumulation. This central location will not only serve as the initial meeting place for project participants, but also as the location where trash bags are brought by pickup trucks for transfer to dump or trash trucks.

A parking lot is an ideal central meeting place, if it's not in use on the project date. On Saturdays, school, bank, office, or church parking lots are usually empty. The organizing committee should receive permission from the proper authorities **before** designating a parking lot as the central meeting place. A letter, including the project purpose, date, time, and a promise to leave the

parking lot clean, will typically receive a favorable response. Avoid high traffic areas and always use extreme caution.

If volunteers will not have access to a restroom, seek permission from a local business to use theirs if necessary. If facilities are not made available through local businesses, the organizing committee should arrange for the rental of portable facilities.

Litter Disposal

Arrange for the disposal and/or recycling of collected litter. The organizing committee should first contact local government officials (your local Litter Control and Recycling coordinator or the Department of Public Works is a good place to begin) to determine what services they can provide including:

- Removal of trash bags after the cleanup is complete
- Removal of recyclables
- Removal of large items from the site, such as cars, appliances, tires (volunteers should not attempt to dislodge or remove large items - volunteers should mark the location of such items on their map for removal at a later date)
- Transportation for disposing of trash and recyclables

If local officials are unable to help, the organizing committee should:

- Locate the closest recycling center
- Speak with a recycling center representative to confirm the days and hours of operation, acceptable items, limits on quantity of materials delivered, and specifications for advance preparation. Call and confirm this information a few days prior to the project date.
- If the recycling center will not be open on the project date, secure a place to store recyclables until they can be delivered at a later date.
- Contact the closest landfill and confirm the days and hours of operation. It may be necessary to schedule the cleanup earlier in the day to allow enough time for delivery to the landfill.
- Consult local, private companies that may be able to provide assistance.

Transportation

Cleanup crews should be instructed to deposit all filled trash bags at their assigned starting point (*project organizers should remember to assign starting points - maps will be useful*).

Pickup trucks are useful shuttle vehicles for the collected litter. Volunteers with pickup trucks should be assigned to visit specific starting points and collect any trash bags at these locations.

The organizing committee should distribute a map showing routes between the central meeting

place to pickup points. Volunteers will transport these bags from pickup points to the central meeting location, where they can be transferred to dump or trash trucks. The number of trucks needed depends on the amount of litter and size of the items (determined in the site survey). If there are not enough pickup trucks volunteered prior to the project date, the organizing committee should explore other options, such as your local Litter Control and Recycling coordinator or the local Department of Public Works/Utilities.

If conducting a cleanup by canoe, an outboard boat may also serve as the shuttle vehicle responsible to depositing collected litter at the central meeting location.

Obtain Permission

Obtain written permission from landowners with property in the proposed cleanup section.

Venturing onto private property without permission is trespassing; you may be subject to arrest. The Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation does not, under any circumstances, encourage trespassing. The organizing committee should invite the property owner to participate in the cleanup. If the property owner cannot participate, the organizing committee should obtain *written permission* for volunteers to clean up the trash along the stream where it passes through their land. If you are unsure of the landowner, county tax maps, located in county planning offices, can provide property ownership information. The organizing committee can also determine the property owner by talking to people who live close by.

Before sending the cleanup teams out, the organizing committee should emphasize the importance of staying on public property and public roads, except where expressed permission has been given by the property owner.

Volunteer Recruitment

Recruit stream cleanup volunteers from the local community. Anyone can assist in a stream cleanup project. Children under the age of 18 years should be encouraged to participate but should have permission from parent or guardian. The organizing committee should provide adequate supervision: one adult supervisor for every six children.

Potential volunteer sources:

- Residents
- Employees of nearby businesses and industries
- School groups (classes, science / ecology clubs, etc.)
- Church groups
- Scout troops

Initiate volunteer recruitment approximately *6 weeks* prior to the project date. The number of volunteers needed depends upon the area to be covered and the magnitude of litter accumulations. Typically, a two-person team can cover one mile of a lightly littered stream channel in about one

or two hours. As a rule, 50 percent of those people who initially sign up for an event will not actually participate. For this reason, the organizing committee should recruit twice as many people that will be needed for the project. If more people show up than anticipated, volunteers can work in larger teams than two.

The organizing committee should establish a phone number (contact person) whom volunteers can call to register for the event. When volunteers register, get their names, addresses and telephone numbers. As volunteers respond to recruitment activities, members of the organizing committee should advise them on what to bring and how to dress. Volunteers should be prepared to walk or canoe distances, get wet and get dirty. Recommend that volunteers wear sturdy shoes or boots, long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, work gloves, and a hat or outerwear as the weather dictates. Volunteers should also be encouraged to use sunscreen and insect repellent.

The organizing committee should recruit, from the volunteer labor force, several field supervisors or site captains who will assist volunteers during the cleanup. Approximately one supervisor should be recruited for every 10 volunteers. The organizing committee should host a training session for these supervisors **prior** to the project date, so that their role can be defined.

The organizing committee should send reminders of the date (and rain date) and time of the event, as well as maps showing the location of the central meeting place to all registered volunteers *one week before* the stream cleanup. If time allows, committee members may also call the volunteers a few days before the event to confirm participation in the stream cleanup.

Event Publicity

Advertise the stream cleanup project. Event publicity should complement your volunteer recruitment efforts. Volunteer recruitment should be initiated at least *6 weeks* in advance of the project date. This time will allow the organizing committee to draft, reproduce, and distribute fliers; draft and distribute press releases to local newspapers and/or organizational newsletters, and offer presentations at group meetings.

- Recruitment messages should include the name, day, date and starting time of the event, the rain date, location and directions to the central meeting place, name of the adopting group or organization, and a contact's name and phone number.
- Recruitment messages should be enthusiastic and include a "sales pitch." A sales pitch should emphasize the enjoyment of the activity and emphasize proximity to potential volunteers.
- Direct mail members of the adopting group or organization and similar groups. This type of targeted mailing will be more fruitful than a mailing to a "cold list" - individuals who may not be familiar with your activities.
- Have a phone number where volunteers can call to register and include the number in all advertisements.
- Coordinate cleanup events with other events and/or projects, such as Fall River Renaissance, Operation Spruce-Up, Earth Day, or Community Cleanup, and your project will benefit from greater exposure.

Equipment and Materials

Gather cleanup equipment and materials. Equipment can often be borrowed from state or local government offices and/or local environmental organizations. The organizing committee should make arrangements to have borrowed equipment delivered or picked up and then returned. Any equipment that cannot be borrowed should be purchased *two to three weeks prior* to the project date.

To conduct a successful cleanup, you will need to provide site-captains and cleanup crews with the following:

- large trash bags and boxes for recyclables
- work gloves
- rakes, shovels, and/or litter poles
- flagging tape
- maps (each team will need two maps ❶ a map of the stream section, showing major litter accumulations; and; ❷ a road map showing the route between their stream section and the central meeting place)
- First Aid kits

Refreshments and Other Rewards

Refreshments are one way to thank volunteers for their valuable time and hard work. It is recommended that the project sponsor provide non-alcoholic beverages. If beverages will not be provided, the organizing committee should encourage participants to bring their own. *Participants should be reminded to avoid drinking water from any stream and encouraged to take breaks and drink fluids to avoid overexertion.* Simple refreshments (coffee and doughnuts, cookies and punch) may be offered during registration, or as a time for volunteers to celebrate a job well done at day's-end. A picnic or barbecue are also nice ways to thank volunteers. Local businesses and/or the volunteers themselves (pot-luck) may be willing to donate food/drink, coolers, cups, ice, paper goods, etc.

The organizing committee could also consider providing rewards, such as certificates, bumper-stickers, tote bags, caps or t-shirts. The committee may solicit contributions, both monetary and in-kind services, from local businesses. Including handouts and other educational materials in your stream cleanup program is another option.

Project Prep

Provide site-captain training, conduct safety meeting, and complete site preparation. A

representative of the organizing committee should make arrangements to meet with site-captains *prior* to the project day or, if necessary, immediately before the start time on the project day.

Site-captains should be prepared to:

- Answer volunteers' questions
- Direct volunteers to cleanup and disposal sites
- If required, make sure data sheets are completed correctly and turned in
- Help organize and distribute the refreshments and rewards

Everyone participating in the cleanup must have attended at least one Adopt-A-Stream safety meeting in the previous 12 months. This safety meeting may be conducted immediately before the cleanup at the central meeting location. A member of the organizing committee or site-captain must review the Adopt-A-Stream safety guidelines with all volunteers.

All volunteers must complete and sign a liability release form. A sample liability release form is provided for your use. Immediately before the cleanup is also a good time to deliver any educational messages.

For stream cleanups, little site preparation is required. Sensitive areas should be cordoned off with flagging. Private property boundaries should also be identified with flagging to avoid inadvertent trespassing.

The Cleanup

Organize volunteers and initiate stream cleanup. Provide a “sign-in sheet” for volunteers at the central meeting place on the day of the cleanup. The sheet should include spaces for the volunteer’s name, address, and phone number. (Remember to provide pencils or pens.) Volunteers who have not completed and signed a safety liability release form must do so before participating in any cleanup activity. Nametags help volunteers get to know each other.

Project supervisor responsibilities:

- introduce each of the site-captains and explain their roles
- brief volunteers on whether the litter collected is to be separated into recyclable and non- recyclable materials
- brief volunteers on where to place filled bags
- brief volunteers on the boundary of the project site
- list who the project supervisors are in case of emergency.

- inform volunteers about the availability of refreshments and location of restroom facilities
- help site-captains form cleanup teams

Teams: *No works alone - always work in teams of two or more!*

- Each team needs transportation to and from their assigned section
- Form teams according to who has a car, canoe, or boat
- Teams will be assigned a one-mile stream section (if necessary, section may be less than a mile)
- Each team will be given trash bags and a set of maps
- Teams should get from the project supervisor a specific time to return to the central meeting area, even if their work is unfinished
- **Volunteers should call if they will be returning late or not at all, so that all are accounted for and there's no cause for worry**

Site-captain responsibilities:

- help each team identify a starting point in the middle of their assigned section (generally, the abundance of litter declines dramatically the further you get from the access point)
- instruct teams to walk, canoe, or boat a half-mile upstream from the starting point (distance traveled upstream and downstream should be half of the total distance to be covered), then collect trash on their return trip to the access point (if necessary, separating recyclables and non-recyclables)

This collection method helps volunteers avoid transporting full bags of trash great distances.

After dropping off any full trash bags at the access point or other previously identified location, teams should then walk, canoe, or boat a half-mile downstream, again collecting trash as they return to the starting point. If there is a question of how to judge when they've traveled far enough, suggest to the volunteers that they should travel until they run into the team cleaning the neighboring section.

Teams should leave all filled trash bags at their starting point. Approximately 1-2 hours later, volunteers with pickup trucks should begin visiting starting points to collect any trash bags. Drivers should return all collected bags to the central meeting place, where trash can be sorted and recycled. For larger cleanup events, outboard boat assistance provided by the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC), the U.S. Coast Guard, local fishing groups, or individual citizens may be used to transport trash from canoes or boats to the central meeting place. If there are no pickup arrangements with the local government, volunteers should haul trash to the landfill and recyclables to the recycling center as needed.

Cleanup crews should reconvene at the central meeting place by the assigned time. Project organizers should provide refreshments and rewards to help volunteers celebrate their accomplishments.

VOLUNTEER TIPS

1. *Never work alone - TEAM UP!*
2. *If you get lost, find the nearest stream and follow it downstream - you will eventually reach a road crossing.*
3. *Never drink from the stream.*
4. *Always watch where you are going - never put your hands or feet in places where you cannot see.*
5. *Do not trespass.*
6. *Do not handle sharp metal objects or broken glass.*
7. *Do not touch anything that looks toxic - report the item to the Department of Health by calling (804) 786-1763.*
8. *Leave downed trees alone, unless they are causing flooding or erosion.*

Follow-up

After the cleanup, please remember to send copies of the sign-in sheets and all completed and signed safety liability release forms to the Virginia Adopt-A-Stream program coordinator at the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation. This information generates Certificates of Appreciation for each volunteer and organization involved in the cleanup. DCR also compiles the information into a community database of individuals and organizations to facilitate networking among groups and individuals interested in water quality issues.

The project supervisor is also responsible for sending in a completed stream cleanup data form. The information on this form will allow DCR to monitor and evaluate the progress of the Adopt-A-Stream Program.

All materials should be sent *within two weeks of the project date* to:

Attn: Adopt-A-Stream program coordinator
Virginia Dept. Conservation and Recreation
203 Governor Street, Suite 206
Richmond, Virginia 23219-2094

Fax: (804) 786-1798

RECOGNITION SIGNS

All adopting organizations will be awarded a round, metal Adopt-A-Stream sign, which includes the organization's name, to place at a location of their choice. The adopting organization will be

responsible for posting and maintaining the Adopt-A-Stream sign. Permission must be secured before posting the sign on public or private property. Once the sign-in sheets, safety liability release forms, and the stream cleanup data form have been at DCR, the program coordinator will work with the project sponsor(s) to facilitate the exchange and installation of the official Adopt-A-Stream sign.

Any other questions or concerns regarding the Adopt-A-Stream Program should be directed to the coordinator at (804) 692-0148.